



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

## Sacramento, Delevan, Colusa and Sutter National Wildlife Refuges

*April, 2006 Planning Update #2*

### Thank You for Participating

*We would like to thank everyone who took part in the public scoping meetings held in July 2005, as well as those who provided comments electronically and by mail.*



*Tidytips, photo by Joe Silveira*

### Comprehensive Conservation Plan: Public Scoping

#### Greetings from the Refuges

This is the second Planning Update from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) to keep you informed and involved regarding the comprehensive conservation planning process for Sacramento, Delevan, Colusa, and Sutter National Wildlife Refuges (Refuges) (Figure 1).

#### Public Scoping

We began the Comprehensive Conservation Planning (CCP) process in July 2005 with public scoping meetings in Willows, Colusa, and Yuba City. The purpose of these meetings was to introduce the public to the Refuges and the CCP process, and to hear people's comments and concerns about Sacramento, Delevan, Colusa, and Sutter NWRs.

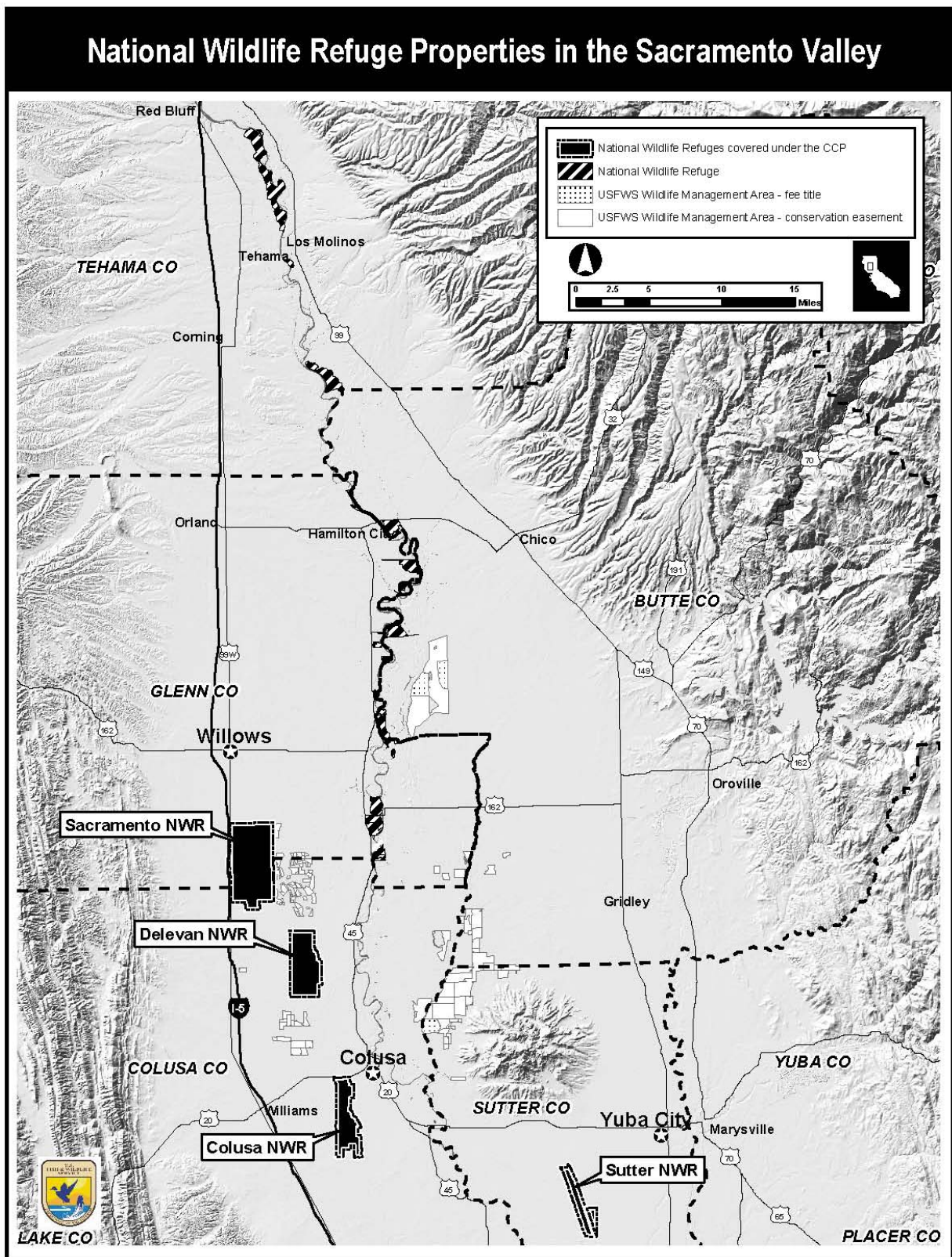
Thirty-five people attended the three public scoping sessions. Table 1 summarizes the issues,

concerns and opportunities raised in the 131 comments we received during the scoping period. These comments were grouped into five main categories: public use (64), refuge management (22), wildlife and habitat (21), flooding (11), and other (13).

Public use received the most comments of which 55 of the 64 comments were about hunting. Three comments stated fishing should be allowed on the Refuges. Many of the hunting comments urged the Service to maximize the quantity and quality of hunting opportunities on the Refuges. There were two comments about environmental education and outreach and four about other public uses.

The refuge management category received twenty-two comments. Three comments stated that the Refuges should continue with their

Figure 1. Map of National Wildlife Refugees in the Sacramento Valley.



current management. Three comments expressed concern about water supply for the Refuges and two comments expressed the need for more law enforcement. One comment requested more prescribed burning on the Refuges and another stated that the prescribed burning program should be eliminated. The twelve other comments in this category ranged from assessing the impacts of recreation on native flora and fauna to expanding the Refuges.

Twenty-one comments regarding wildlife and habitat issues were received. Several of the comments suggested increasing the waterfowl production on the Refuges by providing more breeding habitat in the closed areas. Several other comments expressed concern with the declining pheasant populations both on and off the Refuges. Several other comments suggested leaving remnant stands of cover in treated management units.

Sutter NWR was the focus of the eleven comments on flooding. Approximately 80 percent of the Refuge is located within the Sutter Bypass. The Sutter Bypass was built in the 1920s and is a dedicated flood control channel. The comments expressed concern that vegetation on the Refuge may obstruct flood water flows and provide a safety concern to properties in Sutter, Colusa, and Yolo counties.

The thirteen comments in the “other comments” category ranged from requesting that the Sacramento River Conservation Area Forum land owner assurances policy be incorporated in the CCP, to specific topics to be covered in the CCP. Several comments suggested consulting different plans and surveys to obtain more information.

The Service considers all of these comments to be “issues to resolve” during the planning process. Each will receive an in-depth analysis that will help to define the range of alternatives

for the Environmental Assessment. Although the official scoping comment period ended on September 1, 2005, comments are welcome at any time during the planning process.

**Table 1. Refuge Issues Identified Through Public Comment.**

<b>Refuge Issue Category</b>	<b>Number of Comments<sup>1</sup></b>
<b>Public Use</b>	<b>64</b>
Hunting	55
Fishing	3
Environmental Education/Outreach	2
Other Public Uses	4
<b>Refuge Management</b>	<b>22</b>
Continue Current Management	3
Water Supply	3
Refuge Management	12
Law Enforcement/Fire Program	4
<b>Wildlife &amp; Habitat</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Flooding Issues</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Other Comments</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Total Comments (Total Number of People/Organizations Commenting)</b>	<b>131 (46)</b>

<sup>1</sup> Total number of comments received is greater than the total number of people commenting since each of the letters, emails, faxes, and comments cards may contain more than one comment.



Shorebird migrations peak during April on the Refuges. (*Greater yellowlegs, photo by Steve Emmons*)



## Draft Vision Statement and Goals

The Service is in the process of refining the draft vision statement and goals for the Refuges. We welcome any comments or suggestions that you may have.

### ***Draft Vision Statement***

"Located in the Sacramento Valley of California, Sacramento, Delevan, Colusa and Sutter National Wildlife Refuges are some of the most important wintering areas for waterfowl along the Pacific Flyway and in North America. The Refuges' wetland, upland, and riparian communities will provide high-quality habitat for a diverse array of wildlife species including migratory waterfowl, shorebirds, birds of prey, and songbirds. These habitats will also provide food, water, and cover for threatened and endangered species including vernal pool plants and invertebrates, and giant garter snakes.

Working with partners, the Refuges will provide a wide range of environmental education programs and promote high quality wildlife-dependent recreation in order to maintain a refuge support base and attract new visitors. Compatible wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities for hunting, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation will be provided on the Refuges."

### *Draft Goals*

- Conserve, manage, restore, and enhance habitats and associated plant and wildlife species, with an emphasis on supporting an abundance and natural diversity of wintering and migrating waterfowl, shorebirds, birds of prey, and songbirds.

- Conserve, manage, restore, and enhance threatened and endangered species and their habitats including vernal pool plants and invertebrates, and giant garter snakes.
- Provide visitors of all ages and abilities with quality wildlife-dependent recreation and interpretation opportunities to enhance public appreciation, understanding, and enjoyment of fish, wildlife, habitats, and cultural resources.
- Encourage and facilitate management-oriented research to build upon the knowledge base for management of Refuge, Central Valley, and Pacific Flyway wildlife, plant, and habitat resources.
- Promote partnerships to preserve, restore, and enhance diverse, healthy, and productive ecosystems.
- Protect all natural and cultural resources, staff, visitors, equipment, facilities, and other property on the Refuges.



Visit the Refuges during the spring and view spectacular wildflowers covering the vernal pools. (*Fremont's goldfields and Hoover's downingia*, photo by Joe Silveira)

## Refuge News

### Exploring the Refuges

A diversity of birds offered visitors great opportunities for enjoying the Refuges this winter. Wildlife watchers witnessed large numbers of snow geese, white-fronted geese, pintail, mallards, and white-faced ibis. Also, sightings of golden and bald eagles, an emperor goose, and a prairie falcon were reported by visitors. Photographers not only took pictures of the abundant waterfowl, but also of peregrine falcons and a family of hybrid white-fronted/cackling geese. Students and conservation groups explored the Wetlands Walk Trail using the new full-color brochure guide. Waterfowl hunters harvested a 2-3 bird per hunter average within the hunting blinds and free roam areas. Annually, the Refuges receive approximately 118,000 visits.



*Waterfowl near the Sutter Buttes, photo by USFWS*

### California Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey Results

The results of the 2006 Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey (Table 2) are in and indicate that, overall, wintering waterfowl populations in California did not change significantly from 2005. The indices for most of the common species of ducks changed only 5-15%, indicating that wintering populations of these species are stable or slightly increasing. Goose and swan data also indicate stable or increasing populations for most species.

The Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey is conducted throughout the Pacific Flyway each January to help assess waterfowl populations and distribution. Most areas are surveyed by fixed-wing aircraft. Along with information from other surveys, the data are used to help manage and monitor waterfowl populations and set hunting regulations. Below are results for some common species:

**Table 2. Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey Results**

Species	2005	2006	% change from 2005	% change from 2001-05 Average
Mallard	488,594	<b>417,033</b>	-14.6	21.4
Gadwall	179,867	<b>200,774</b>	11.6	25.4
Wigeon	614,356	<b>672,382</b>	9.4	34.2
G-w Teal	453,654	<b>406,123</b>	-10.5	17.6
Shoveler	513,055	<b>543,032</b>	5.8	22.8
Pintail	1,086,257	<b>1,151,541</b>	6.0	1.8
All Dabbling Ducks	3,341,454	<b>3,402,931</b>	1.8	16.1
Canvasback	44,515	<b>42,731</b>	-4.0	-12.4
Scaup	186,301	<b>159,724</b>	-14.3	6.9
Ring-necked	100,247	<b>96,476</b>	-3.8	110.3
Bufflehead	23,257	<b>28,067</b>	20.7	-7.3
Ruddy Duck	73,836	<b>98,172</b>	33.0	17.7
All Diving Ducks	433,554	<b>427,931</b>	-1.3	17.8
TOTAL DUCKS	3,831,830	<b>3,879,023</b>	1.2	15.4
White Geese <sup>1</sup>	745,261	<b>473,762</b>	-36.4	0.1
White-fronted G.	391,396	<b>436,619</b>	11.6	66.7
Tundra Swan	74,205	<b>79,412</b>	7.0	21.4
GRAND TOTAL	5,114,821	<b>4,915,148</b>	-3.9	16.4
American Coot	426,000	<b>492,544</b>	15.6	40.5
Sandhill Crane	12,208	<b>17,458</b>	43.0	3.0

<sup>1</sup> Includes lesser snow and Ross' geese combined.

## What's Next?

The next major step in the CCP process is to generate objectives and strategies which will provide the foundation of the management plan. Several management alternatives are being developed, including a "no action" alternative, which maintains the existing management and provides a baseline from which all other alternatives can be compared. Each alternative will be analyzed in the Environmental Assessment accompanying the CCP. Preliminary alternatives will be presented for review and comment in the next update.



*Semipalmated plover, photo by Steve Emmons*

## For More Information

If you have questions, comments, concerns, or would like information about the Refuges, please feel free to call, e-mail, or write us:

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Visit us online at:

<http://sacramentovalleyrefuges.fws.gov>.

*Call or write to us to be placed on our mailing list or to report a change in your mailing address, or if you want to be removed from the mailing list.*



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